

III. PERICTIONE I

There are two documents attributed to "Perictione," the first text is apparently a fragment from a larger work entitled *On the Harmony of Women*. The second text is a brief essay, *On Wisdom*. For reasons to be discussed in the following chapter, it seems correct to identify these works as the writings of two different philosophers and to identify the author of *On the Harmony of Women* with Plato's mother. However this identification is inconclusive. I shall follow Prudence Allen⁷ in identifying the author of *On the Harmony of Women* as Perictione I, and will refer to the author of *On Wisdom* as Perictione II. Perictione I seems to encourage philosophizing by women. If women exercise wisdom and self-control they can aspire to other virtues including justice and courage. She almost appears to adopt a utilitarian perspective on virtue: one exercises particular virtues in order to be able to develop other, higher virtues which will in turn bring happiness and harmony to herself and her family.

1. *Translation of the Text*⁸

One must deem the harmonious woman to be full of wisdom and self-control; a soul must be exceedingly conscious of goodness to be just and courageous and wise, embellished with self-sufficiency and hating empty opinion. Worthwhile things come to a woman from these — for herself, her husband, her children and household, perhaps even for a city — if, at any rate, such a woman should govern cities and tribes, as we see in the case of a royal city.

Having mastery over appetite and high feeling she will be righteous and harmonious; no lawless desires will impel her. She will preserve a loving disposition toward her husband and children and her entire household. As many women as become lovers of alien beds become enemies of all at home, gentry and servants alike. Such a woman continually contrives lies and deceits for her husband and fabricates falsehoods about everything to him, in order that she only may seem to excel in good will and, though she loves idleness, may seem to govern the house. To such an extent, let these things be said.

But one must also train the body to natural measures concerning nourishment and clothing, baths and anointings, the arrangement of the hair, and ornaments of gold and precious stone. Women who eat and drink every costly thing, who dress extravagantly and wear the things that women wear, are ready for the sin of every vice both with respect to the marriage bed and the rest of wrongdoing. It is necessary merely to appease hunger and thirst, even if this be done by frugal means; in the case of cold, even a goat-skin or rough garment would suffice.

To wear cloaks extravagantly purpled by dye-baths of marine shellfish, or of some other lavish color, this is great foolishness. The body wants not to shiver and – for the sake of decency – not to be naked; it requires no more. But in its ignorance human opinion hastens towards the vain and excessive. So the harmonious woman will not wrap herself in gold or precious stone from India or anywhere else, nor will she braid her hair with artful skills or anoint herself with infusions of Arabian scent, nor will she paint her face, whitening or rougeing it, darkening her eyebrows and lashes and treating her gray hair with dye; nor will she be forever bathing. The woman who seeks these things seeks an admirer of feminine weakness. It is the beauty that comes from wisdom, not from these, that gratifies women who are well-born.

But let her not think that nobility of birth, and wealth, and coming from a great city altogether are necessities, nor the good opinion and friendship of eminent and kingly men. If these should be the case, it does not hurt. But, if not, wishing does not make them so. Even if these should be allotted to her, let her soul not pursue the grand and wonderful. Let her walk also apart from them. They harm more than they help, dragging one into misfortune. Treachery and envy and malice abide with them; such a woman would not be serene.

One must revere the gods in the confident hope of happiness, obeying both ancestral laws and institutions. After these [the gods = scl. Meineke], I say to honor and to revere one's parents, for they are and effect everything equally to the gods for their offspring.

With respect to her own husband a woman must thus live lawfully and honorably: not considering anything privately, but preserving and guarding her marriage. For in this is everything. A woman must bear everything on the part of her husband, even if he should be unfortunate, or fail on account of ignorance or illness or drink, or cohabit with other women. For this error is forgiven in the case of men; for women, never. Rather, retribution is imposed. Therefore she must keep the law and not be envious. She must bear anger and stinginess, fault-finding, jealousy and abuse, and any other trait he may have by nature. Being discreet, she must handle all of his characteristics in a way pleasing to him. When a woman is loving towards her husband, and acts agreeably to him, harmony reigns; she loves the entire household and makes outsiders well-disposed towards the house.

But when she is not loving, then she wishes to see safe and sound neither the house nor her own children, nor the servants, nor any of the property but — as if she were an enemy — invokes and prays for total ruin. She even prays for her husband to die, on the grounds that he is hateful, in order that she may cohabit with other men; and whoever pleases him, she hates. But I think a woman is harmonious in the following way: if she becomes full of wisdom and self-control. For this benefits not only her husband, but also the children, relatives, slaves; the whole house, including possessions and friends, both fellow-citizens and foreign guest friends. Artlessly, she will keep their house, speaking and hearing fair things, and obeying her husband in the unanimity of their common life, attending upon the relatives and friends whom he extolls, and thinking the same things sweet and bitter as he — lest she be out of tune in relation to the whole.

7. *Women and Piety*

Returning to a comment she made earlier in the text, Perictione's second fragment applies the normative principle of *harmonia* to the duties towards parents. The principle is violated whenever one fails to obey, revere, and venerate one's parents. Hating them, disobeying them, or speaking ill of them is never justified. Blind obedience is not required. If parents err, you may reason with them, presumably urging them towards right action. But disobedience and disloyalty upset the eternal harmony between generations and are therefore never justified.

8. *Translation of the Text*¹³

From *On the Harmony of Women* by Perictione the Pythagorean.

One must neither speak ill of one's parents nor do them harm, but obey them in matters great and small, in every happenstance of soul and body, of inner and outer life, in peace and in war, in health and in sickness, in wealth and in poverty, in good repute and bad, in private and in public stations; one must march with them and never desert. Even in madness one must well nigh obey them. For the righteous this is wise and honorable. But if someone should despise her parents, having in mind evil of any sort, alive and dead she will be charged with sin by the gods; she will be hated by mankind and for eternity, along with the impious in their place beneath the earth, she will be assailed by evils at the hands of justice and the gods below, who are appointed as overseers of these things.

The very sight of one's parents is divine and lovely, so too the veneration and care of them. Not even the sight of the sun and all the stars which the sky wears and whirls around can compare, nor indeed anything else anyone might

think to be a greater object for contemplation. I am sure the gods are not vexed when they see this occur. Thus, whether living or departed, it is necessary to revere them and never to murmur against them; even if they should act wrongly because of disease or deception, one should exhort and instruct, but in no way hate them. There could be no greater human sin and injustice than to sin against one's parents.

8. Perictione, *On the Harmony of Women*, Fr. 1, Thesleff, *op. cit.*, 142-145; Stobaeus 4.28.19, 688 Hense, translated by Vicki Lynn Harper.